

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

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HONORARY PRESIDENTS: **BRIAN W ALDISS, O.B.E.**
& **HARRY HARRISON**

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Friday 12th August SUMMER SOCIAL

The Black Eagle at Hockley is once again the venue for our summer social. Popular and friendly, the Black Eagle Bar & Restaurant is situated at 16 Factory Road, Hockley, Birmingham, just a couple of hundred yards from

Benson Road Metro Station on the Wolverhampton to Birmingham Metro line.

The Black Eagle offers an excellent range of ever-changing guest ales from small breweries along with 4 or 5 permanent brews. Excellent food is also available throughout the day and evening. They offer a range of great value food including roast chicken, home-made pies, various fish dishes, steaks & grills including an excellent mixed grill. They also have a great selection of daily specials. The Black Eagle has won the CAMRA Birmingham Pub of the Year on several occasions due to their combination of warm and

Sep 9th – Brum Group members **STAN NICHOLLS** (author of the *Orc* fantasy series) and **PETER WESTON** (author of *WITH STARS IN MY EYES*) will discuss the history of SF fandom in London and Birmingham.

friendly service and excellent food and drink.

Most of the available tickets are already taken but if you haven't yet booked there might still be a chance. £5 deposit required – contact me (Rog) **immediately** on 477 6901 if you wish to join us.

See last month's newsletter for times and details of how to get there. Their website is: <http://www.blackaglepub.co.uk/> RGP

SCIENCE FICTION BUT NOT AS YOU KNOW IT ***by Vernon Brown***

It was a matter of third time lucky for us when Pat and I attempted a visit to “Out of this World – Science Fiction But Not As You Know It” recently at the British Library in London, which runs from 20 May to 25 September.

Originally we had planned to go on June 29th but when I arrived home one afternoon I found an invitation to a private view and reception to be held on May 19th to celebrate the opening of the exhibition. My mind raced in anticipation – then the penny dropped! Today was the 19th and the viewing was to start in just over two hours time. I looked at the envelope again to find that the invitation had been sent weeks before but addressed to me at the Briar Rose, who had readdressed it to my home address. And somewhere along the way it had been somewhat delayed. Had I received it just a day earlier we could have gone. Oh well, *c'est la vie*, there's still the 29th! Then I fractured a bone in my hand and we had to cancel that. But we finally got there on July 14th and the wait was worth it.

The exhibition is held in a large square room divided into six separate sections by tall partitions that incorporate display cabinets that, together with the wall cabinets, make a pretty big display area. Each section deals with a separate aspect of SF such as Alien Worlds or Future Worlds, mainly books but some film related material, and each aspect is traced from its earliest beginnings to the present. Obviously it's only possible to show relatively few examples of each but they have been chosen carefully and the significance of each explained.

In addition to the literary displays there are several other things of SF interest. If you are interested in computers you can hold a keyboard/screen conversation with one or try a computerised quiz either by yourself or against a friend. There's a responsive robot and several TV sized screens showing early films while a Tardis stands against a partition and a Wellsian Martian Tripod looms over everything. Music lovers can don headphones and choose from a selection of SF themed material while on the way out you can email postcards to your friends complete with message and SF stamp and postmark.

Back in the Library entrance hall there's a small shop devoted to the exhibition. It has quite a selection of things – SF novels, games, DVDs, souvenirs like fridge magnets, posters, postcards of early SF illustrations etc. It also sells a large book by Mike Ashley expanding on the exhibition which gives a broad history of SF. Most pages carry at least one illustration, coloured or b&w like the original and while it is not an in-depth reference book it makes a welcome addition to anyone's collection (hardcover £28, paperback £17). Somehow I managed to miss seeing an SF art book containing material by Dave Hardy, so look carefully for that.

We spent just under five hours at the exhibition and I think that anyone interested in SF would find it of interest, although there are a couple of more or less minor points that could be improved. The tube illuminating the explanations to one cabinet had gone

and not been replaced/repaired, making them difficult to read, the early films had no information given about them so they effectively meant nothing to the viewer and several serially arranged cabinets would benefit from having an indication of which way to approach them. But overall the exhibition is excellent, I wouldn't have missed it for anything (well, almost).

www.bl.uk/sciencefiction has a lot of information including a quick video tour by China Mieville.

Book by internet, choose your time and method and you can get there and back from Birmingham from about £12. VB

<<and, as part of that Exhibition at the British Library, there will be the following special event – RGP>>

ROB HOLDSTOCK

Heartwood: Telling the Matter of Britain

Friday, 2nd September 2011 (18.30 - 20.00)

British Library, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB

Price: £7.50 / £5 concessions

Book at: <http://www.bl.uk/whatson/events/event123357.html>

or by phoning the British Library Box Office on: +44 (0) 1937 546546

In his extraordinary books *Mythago Wood*, *Lavondyss* and many others, the late Robert Holdstock explored a mythic landscape of this land; using the tools of science fiction and fantasy at timeless depths and earning him acclaim as an heir to Tolkien or Ursula Le Guin. His work will be the starting point for an evening of exploration, discussion and readings with authors Brian Aldiss, Stephen Baxter, Lisa Tuttle, scholar Donald E. Morse (editor of *The Mythic Fantasy of Robert Holdstock*) and other special guests. Chaired by Graham Sleight.

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HOW TRANSISTORS COST US THE PLANETS

by Michael Jones

The worst thing for the exploration of space was the invention of the transistor.

When Arthur C. Clarke famously wrote about communication satellites in geostationary orbits he probably had in mind the technology of the time – thermionic valves. A satellite using this technology would have been the size of an office block, filed with rack upon rack of valves and requiring a fairly substantial source of power to keep them working. The mere process of lifting all this material into orbit would have been a major undertaking, to say nothing of providing the personnel required to put it all together and the support systems needed to keep them alive while they did it.

And all that would just have been the beginning. Valve-based electronics were both undependable and unreliable and the very minimum requirement would have been to have technicians on call 24/7 with the facility to lift into orbit at a moment's notice to carry out emergency repairs. A rolling programme of scheduled maintenance visits would be desirable but would not eliminate all possibility of unexpected breakdown: either way the requirement would exist for quick and easy transport to orbit to be available at any time.

It must be remembered that in this context 'orbit' means 22000 miles above the Earth. The International Space Station is only about 220 miles up, which represents a typical altitude reached by the much-vaunted Space Shuttle.

The ideal would actually be for the satellites to be permanently manned by technical staff able to carry out ongoing maintenance and repairs. Accommodation for them would add to the size of the orbital installation, although the provision already made for the people who built it in the first place would provide a start. However, there would now exist a requirement for a constant orbital traffic carrying food, fuel, air, tools and spare parts, not to mention personnel - in other words, something like a space-going combination of National Express and Eddie Stobart.

And, as has so often been envisaged by science fiction writers down the years, this transportation technology could have been used to explore the Solar System, with the orbital installations as a jumping-off point. Countless stories have been written in which mankind was by the end of the twentieth century colonising Mars, mining the Asteroids and exploring the moons of Jupiter and Saturn.

So what happened? Transistors happened - and solid-state circuits.

A present-day communication satellite is about the size of a car, packed full of integrated circuits and self-powered by solar cells, built on the ground and launched directly into orbit where it continues to function with near 100% reliability for years without human intervention. No space stations needed thank you, therefore no infrastructure to build and support them.

Therefore, no spaceships in which to travel to the planets.

So next time you pick up your iPod or your iPhone, remember that but for the integrated circuits which make it work you could be living on another world. *MJ*

AN INTERVIEW WITH CARRIE VAUGHN

by Theresa Derwen

New York Times Bestselling author Carrie Vaughn took time out from her busy schedule of writing to speak to me about her work. Carrie is a prolific writer most known for her tales of Kitty the Werewolf DJ. She has recently been nominated for a Hugo award for her short story 'Amaryllis' available through *Lightspeed Magazine*.

Theresa: Firstly, congratulations on the Hugo nomination for "Amaryllis". How did it feel hearing this news?

Carrie: Thank you! It felt wonderful and surreal. I'm one of those kids who read a lot of science fiction, and seeing "Hugo Award" somewhere on the cover or description was always special. I never thought I'd ever be up for one myself. The news came via e-mail, and I had to get up from the computer and walk around the house once or twice to calm down before I could finish reading it.



Theresa: Kitty is a DJ on 'The Midnight Hour'. At the start of each Kitty novel is a 'Playlist'. Where did the idea come from?

Carrie: I listen to music when I write, and while writing the first book I developed a list of songs that really jumped out and added to the meaning of the book – a soundtrack, almost. Since Kitty's a DJ herself, it seemed natural to include that list with the book. I liked coming up with the list so much I kept doing it.

Theresa: In *KITTY GOES TO WAR*, there is an indication of something exciting and dangerous happening during Cormac's two year absence. Will you be doing anything such as a novel or Cormac story to expand on his absence in the Kitty universe?

Carrie: Funny you should ask... I've written a novella about Cormac's stretch of missing time. It's called "Long Time Waiting" and will be part of *KITTY'S GREATEST HITS*, the story collection coming out in August (in the US – the UK date is probably pretty close to that).

Theresa: It is clear you love writing genre fiction. What is it about the darker side of things that appeals to you?

Carrie: It's not necessarily the darker side of things – I try to include a lot of humour in the Kitty books and in many of the other stories I write. What really draws me to genre fiction is that vaunted 'sense of wonder'. I love the 'what if' questions, pushing the envelope, making things crazy and magical. In the Kitty books especially, I've posited a world where supernatural legends and folklore are all real. What I really want to know is how that would affect our modern world – the juxtaposition of vampires and reality TV, werewolves and Senate hearings. I like to see how much weirdness I can get away with. Turns out, quite a lot!

Theresa: Kitty is fiercely passionate, protective of her pack, and a strong independent woman. Is there anything of you in Kitty?

Carrie: I get asked this a lot, and I'm not sure I'm the right person to ask. I mostly see the differences between me and Kitty – she's much more outspoken and impulsive. People

who have met me once or twice say I'm a lot like Kitty, but people who know me well say I'm not. So I think we have some superficial traits in common – we're both blond, for example. But Kitty is really a whole lot more extroverted than I am.

Theresa: A little birdie tells me that you may have some history in Gaming. What can you tell us about this?

Carrie: I've played role-playing games in one form or another since college. I spent a year abroad at the University of York, and the Science Fiction Society there had a vibrant and active gaming community and I really learned about gaming from them, playing everything from *Star Wars* to Cyberpunk to D&D and everything in between. What I really like about this kind of gaming is the storytelling – it's recreational and social for me. I'm making up a story with a bunch of friends rather than doing it on my own. I don't do any computer gaming, which is how I get so much written, I think.

Theresa: So, what's next for you Carrie?

Carrie: I've got a few more Kitty books, at least, to write. I've also been branching out into young adult novels (Steel, Voices of Dragons) and stand-alone fantasy (Discord's Apple, After the Golden Age). I hope to do a lot more in both those areas. I'm always working on short stories as well. So, keeping busy! Check my website (www.carrievaughn.com) for updates.

Theresa: Thank you again for taking the time to answer these questions.

Carrie: Thanks for asking them!

2011 LOCUS AWARDS

Best SF Novel: BLACKOUT / ALL CLEAR by Connie Willis (Ballantine Spectra)

Best Fantasy Novel: KRAKEN by China Mieville Macmillan UK; Del Rey)

Best First Novel: THE HUNDRED THOUSAND KINGDOMS by N K Jemisin (Orbit UK; Orbit US)

Best Young Adult Book: SHIP BREAKER by Paolo Bacigalupi (Little Brown)

Best Novella: THE LIFECYCLE OF SOFTWARE OBJECTS by Ted Chiang (Subterranean)

Best Novelette: "The Truth is a Cave in the Black Mountains" by Neil Gaiman (STORIES)

Best Short Story: "The Thing About Cassandra" by Neil Gaiman (SONGS OF LOVE AND DEATH)

Best Anthology: WARRIORS edited by George R R Martin & Gardner Dozois (Tor)

Best Collection: FRITZ LEIBER: SELECTED STORIES by Fritz Leiber (Night Shade)

Best Non-fiction Book: ROBERT A HEINLEN: IN DIALOGUE WITH HIS CENTURY: VOLUME 1 1907-1948: LEARNING CURVE by William H Patterson, Jr (Tor)

Best Art Book: SPECTRUM 17 edited by Cathy & Arnie Fenner (Underwood)

Best Artist: Shaun Tan

Best Editor: Ellen Datlow

Best Magazine: ASIMOV'S

Best Book Publisher: Tor

THE SHIRLEY JACKSON AWARD WINNERS

The winners of the 2010 Shirley Jackson Award were announced on July 17. The award is presented to recognize outstanding achievement in the literature of psychological suspense, horror, and the dark fantastic.

Novel: MR SHIVERS by Robert Jackson Bennett
Novella: MYSTERIUM TREMENDUM by Laird Barron
Novellette: “Truth Is a Cave in the Black Mountains” by Neil Gaiman
Short Story: “The Things” by Peter Watts
Single-Author Collection: OCCULTATION by Laird Barron
Edited Anthology: STORIES: ALL NEW TALES edited by Neil Gaiman and Al Sarrantonio

HUGO AWARD NOMINEES

Best Novel

BLACKOUT/ALL CLEAR by Connie Willis (Ballantine Spectra)
CRYOBURN by Lois McMaster Bujold (Baen)
THE DERVISH HOUSE by Ian McDonald (Gollancz; Pyr)
FEED by Mira Grant (Orbit)
THE HUNDRED THOUSAND KINGDOMS by N.K. Jemisin (Orbit)

Best Novella

“The Lady Who Plucked Red Flowers beneath the Queen’s Window” by Rachel Swirsky (*Subterranean Mag*, Summer 2010)
THE LIFE CYCLE OF SOFTWARE OBJECTS by Ted Chiang (Subterranean)
“The Maiden Flight of McCauley’s Bellerophon” by Elizabeth Hand (STORIES: ALL NEW TALES, William Morrow)
“The Sultan of the Clouds” by Geoffrey A. Landis (*Asimov’s*, September 2010)
“Troika” by Alastair Reynolds (GODLIKE MACHINES, SF Book Club)

Best Novellette

“Eight Miles” by Sean McMullen (*Analog*, September 2010)
“The Emperor of Mars” by Allen M. Steele (*Asimov’s*, June 2010)
“The Jaguar House in Shadow” by Aliette de Bodard (*Asimov’s*, July 2010)
“Plus or Minus” by James Patrick Kelly (*Asimov’s*, December 2010)
“That Leviathan Whom Thou Hast Made” by Eric James Stone (*Analog*, September 2010)

Best Short Story

“Amaryllis” by Carrie Vaughn (*Lightspeed*, June 2010)
“For Want of a Nail” by Mary Robinette Kowal (*Asimov’s*, September 2010)
“Ponies” by Kij Johnson (Tor.com, November 17 2010)
“The Things” by Peter Watts (*Clarksworld*, January 2010)

...AND WHAT DID YOU THINK?

THE LETTER COLUMN OF ‘BRUM GROUP NEWS’

Anything to say about the Group, meetings or SF in general? Email your opinions to me at [rog.peyton \[at\] btinternet \[dot\] com](mailto:rog.peyton[at]btinternet[dot]com)

Apologies to long-time BSGF member Robert Day for missing this letter last month (but it's still relevant): Just received the 40th anniversary Newsletter; and it's nice to see some authors aired who don't normally get a mention these days. In the *News in Brief*, you mention Phil Harbottle successfully selling titles from authors now little regarded, but I have to dispute that Brian Ball was ‘old hat’ in the 1970s. I remember Brian Ball's books in Dobson library editions in the late 60s and early 70s, and they were anything but ‘old hat’ - I remember exotic and (to my young teenage eyes) edgy time travel stories. Finding a Brian Ball book was a red-letter day, only matched by the gritty and exciting space operas of John Rankine (INTERSTELLAR TWO-FIVE, ONE IS ONE, NEVER THE SAME

DOOR and MOONS OF TRIOPUS stick in my memory). Now, when can we see any of those back in print? You wanted suggestions for publishing projects...

And then in your recommendations this month, you cite another long-lost author - Lloyd Biggle Jnr. Highly under-rated, and it's nice to see his work coming back into print. Though I still treasure my 1975 NEL paperback of ALL THE COLOURS OF DARKNESS for its gloriously inappropriate cover. Consider this: the dying King lies on his funeral bier; around him stands his Palace Guard in full armour with their ceremonial pikestafis, heads bowed in sorrow, with some of them shedding a silent tear for the passing of their master. Meanwhile, overhead the fleets of flying saucers recede into the purple-green twilight..... The novel, as of course you remember, is all about the introduction of commercial matter transmitters to a contemporary human society, their impact on that society and its economy, and the reaction of the undercover aliens for whom this may precipitate Earth being accepted into the Galactic community, if only they consider the planet ready for such a step. Not a dying king, tearful guardsmen or flying saucer to be seen anywhere.

<<I bow to your superior knowledge of the work of Brian Ball. I formed my opinion from reading a few pages of one of his novels - and meeting him. John Rankine was someone I always considered as a writer of juveniles and therefore never got to read anything by him either. - RGP>>

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .



.... Author **Theodore Roszak** (b. 1933) died on July 5. Roszak was best known as an historian of the 1960s, who published THE MAKING OF A COUNTER CULTURE. While working as a history professor from California State University, East Bay, he published the novel THE MEMOIRS OF ELIZABETH FRANKENSTEIN, for which he received a James Tiptree, Jr. Award in 1995. His most famous book here in the UK has to be FLICKER, a wonderful novel that I've recommended to many people The Orion Publishing Group has announced that the third edition of the **ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION** will be "released online later this year by the newly formed ESF, Ltd, in association with Victor Gollancz - and will be available FREE to all users." A free eBook from SF great, **Eric Brown**, has broken into iTunes' top 100 free downloads chart for America. "The Blue Portal" is the short story upon which the award-winning author's groundbreaking novel, THE KINGS OF ETERNITY, is based. More than 2,500 copies of "The Blue Portal" have been downloaded in just four days - putting it at #73 in the US chart, above perennial 'classics' such as PRIDE AND PREJUDICE and THE JUNGLE BOOK! The winners of the **Campbell Award** (Best SF novel) and **Sturgeon Award** (Best short story) have been announced. The Campbell Award winner is THE DERVISH HOUSE by **Ian McDonald** and the Sturgeon Award winner is "The Sultan of the Clouds" by **Geoffrey A. Landis** The winners of the 2010 Prometheus Awards have been announced by the Libertarian Futurist Society. The Prometheus Awards are given to honour excellence in libertarian science fiction. Best Novel: DARKSHIP THIEVES by **Sarah Hoyt**. Hall of Fame Award: ANIMAL FARM by **George Orwell** The Cordwainer Smith Rediscovery Award seeks to recognize and draw attention to lesser-known fantasy or

science fiction authors. This year's award went to **Katherine MacLean**, perhaps best known for writing the Nebula Award winning novella, "The Missing Man". MacLean has written five novels, three in conjunction with **Charles V. De Vet**, and several short stories The winners of the Rhysling Award, presented annually for best SF poetry were "The Sea King's Second Bride" by **C S E Cooney** (Long Poem) and "El Codex Chupacabra" by **Juan Manuel Perez** (Short Poem). The Lifetime Achievement award went to **Jane Yolen** **Hannu Rajaniemi's** debut, THE QUANTUM THIEF, continues to sell on for Gollancz, ten months after publication. Almost another 1,000 sales this month, adding up to over 21,000 sales in hardback, trade paperback and e-books, making it the company's bestselling SF debut in several years **Robert J. Sawyer** announces his Hollywood agent has "just closed a development deal with Original Pictures, Inc., for a TV series adaptation of my WWW novels" **Borders**, which has been suffering from financial set backs and earlier declared bankruptcy, failed to find a buyer. Store closings may begin as early as July 22 and will ultimately affect 10,700 employees as the last 399 Borders close Scientists have announced the discovery of a fourth moon in orbit around **Pluto**. Pluto's first discovered moon, Charon, was found in 1978. Two more moons, Nyx and Hydra, were identified in 2005. The new moon, which is currently called P4, is believed to be between 13 and 34 km in diameter and orbits Pluto every 32 days at a distance of about 59,000 km, between the orbits of Nyx and Hydra

RGP

BOOK REVIEWS

(**REVIEWERS** please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at rog [dot] peyton [at] btinternet [dot] com) **Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting.**

BLACKOUT by *Connie Willis*

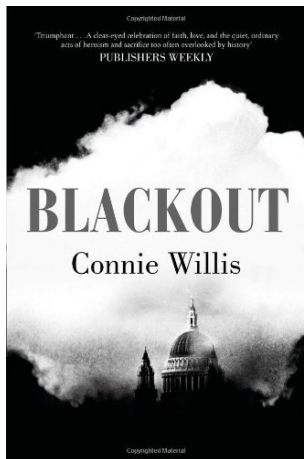
Gollancz / 624pgs / £20.00 hardcover ISBN 978-0575099265

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Connie Willis' latest book is published in two parts, the second half entitled ALL CLEAR being due for UK publication later this year. The basic framework is a future (first introduced in her 1982 story "Fire Watch" and featured also in two previous novels: DOOMSDAY BOOK and TO SAY NOTHING OF THE DOG) in which historians from Oxford University travel back through time from the mid-21st Century to various historical eras to carry out observations and research. Presumably their scholarly dissertations on what they have seen and learned are intended to form an archive of historical knowledge for the edification of future generations.

BLACKOUT mainly follows three of these historians who travel separately to England in 1940 to observe aspects of WW2, including the London Blitz and the Evacuation of Dunkirk. Almost from the outset things start to go wrong in various small ways with their planned activities and as they variously struggle to cope with these problems and the difficulties and dangers of wartime England they begin to realise themselves cut off from their own time. The resulting narrative can be complicated and, at times, difficult to come fully to terms with as it switches from one time and place to another to follow these main characters. Additionally, it brings in a few others who appear

subsidiary but may yet have some important part to play in bringing about a satisfactory final resolution for all concerned.



Although ostensibly a science fiction novel in a historical setting, this book can also be viewed as an historical novel with some science fiction connotations. As such it is a stirring and dramatic evocation of day-to-day life in wartime England as experienced by people who might as well be foreigners there, and for whom no amount of training and preparation can really be sufficient. The day-to-day minutiae of this life are either brilliantly and comprehensively imagined or meticulously researched: we are supposed to believe the latter but occasional linguistic anachronisms occur and some details are described, particularly with reference to railway trains, which would be more representative of life in the USA than in England. Such mistakes are few, but enough to mar the intended appearance of 100% authenticity.

The story and books referred to above won between them several major SF Awards and BLACKOUT/ALL CLEAR has already won a Nebula to add to Willis' already substantial trophy collection as well as being nominated for Hugo and Locus Awards. Its merit is thus firmly established and to be sure the criticisms outlined above could be described as minor in the overall context of the work. The only remaining reservation is that the author's insistence on exploring and describing every possible detail has resulted in almost inordinate length – after all, these 610 pages constitute only half a book!

Perhaps final judgement might be reserved until the appearance of ALL CLEAR here in the UK; when the totality of both volumes can be assessed as one. Until then BLACKOUT can certainly be described as a major achievement. Only those who lived through it and experienced it at first hand can truly appreciate what it was like to live in a country at war and it is made clear in an afterword that a deal of information was obtained from talking to such people. As such it is deserving of being carefully read, regardless of whether the reader's primary interest is the science fiction aspect: it may be that SF will come more to the fore in the second volume. *Mj*

THE TALES OF BAUCHELAIN AND KORBAL BROACH, VOL 1 ***by Steven Erikson***

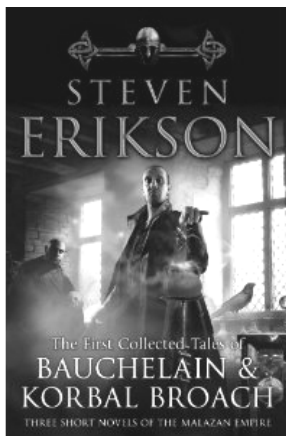
Bantam / 381pgs / £7.99 paperback ISBN: 978-0553825732

Reviewed by Jim Pearce

THE TALES OF BAUCHELAIN AND KORBAL BROACH consists of three short novels which are set in the author's extensive *Malazan Empire* series following the (mis)deeds of two sorcerers and their manservant. Bauchelain, whose principle hobby is described as the conjuring of demons, is the predominant of the two conjurers. His companion Korbal Broach is a shape shifting eunuch and is described as an explorer of the mysteries of life and death and all that lies beyond.

The first story, "Blood Follows", is set in the city of Lamentable Moll, and describes how Emancipor Reese, a down-on-his-luck manservant, otherwise known as Mancy the Luckless, meets and is employed by Bauchelain. As turns out to be the case in

all of the stories mayhem and murder abound and a swift departure from the city is required.



“The Lees of Laughter’s End” follows on from “Blood Follows” describing their voyage on the ship *Suncurl*. Unfortunately, unscrupulous persons in Lamentable Moll sold the captain a batch of iron nails that once resided in the wood of sarcophagi in the barrows of Lamentable Moll - the self same barrows that are well known for restless spirits. As the story relates, “even the dead can sing songs of freedom”. As the ship enters the blood-red seas off Laughter’s End the spirits of the dead awake. Fortunately (?) for the motley (very) crew, Korbal has created an homunculus which is used to fight the awakened litch. The story ends on a cliff-hanger.

“The Healthy Dead”, the third and last of the stories, is set approximately four years after the actions outlined above. This is rather unfortunate as I would have liked to know how they survived the predicament lurking at the end of “The Lees of Laughter’s End”. In this story the trio is approached by citizens of the city of Quaint to rescue them from a catastrophic plague of goodness brought about by the city’s King Macrothus after his overthrow of his brother Necrotus the Nilile. They are successful, but in an unexpected manner.

These stories are dark, grimy and murky and none of the characters is likable but they are strangely compelling. They are very well written being full of weird and colourful characters such as Aply Druther, Heck Urse, Gust Hubb, Bird Mottle and Storkul Purge the Paladin of Wellness. Overall I rather enjoyed them and would, if I had the opportunity, read more of the adventures of this unsavoury trio. *JTP*

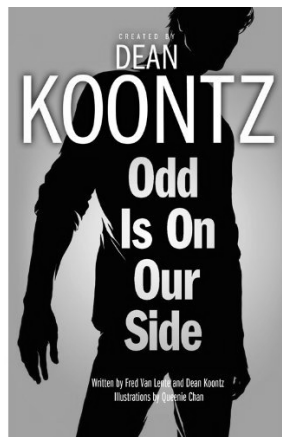
ODD IS ON OUR SIDE by Fred Van Lente and Dean Koontz Illustrated by Queenie Chan

Harper Collins/ 186 pgs/ £7.99 paperback ISBN: 978-0007371112

Reviewed by Sam Fennell

I’ve read Koontz’s novels ODD THOMAS and X LIGHT which are based on the life of Odd Thomas; a teen who can see ‘demons’ which accumulate before a major catastrophe and mass loss of life. Consequently stories of Odd are usually based on him having an insight into some sort of terrible event before it occurs. This book is no exception in following that formula, although this is a very slim paperback/graphic novel aimed at younger teens.

In this novel, Odd sees the ‘demons’ accumulating around his town, and he soon identifies that there is a murder spree about to happen. Of course he manages to stop it with the help of his attractive girlfriend and his frequent supernatural visitor, Elvis Presley.



What's great about this book is its accessibility for young teens. Odd is a character easy to identify with; a lowly fry-cook without much money, but who has a special ability. The lowly by day/hero by night is a cliché that is so popular in the world of super heroes, simply because it draws readers into the possibilities of a mundane life made more exciting.

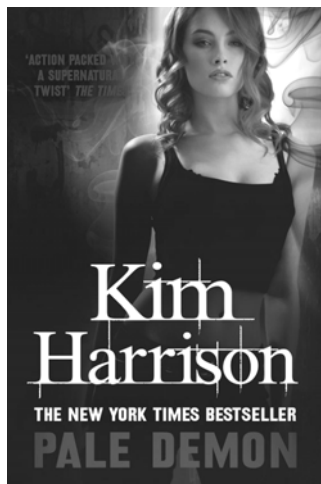
What let this book down is its general quality and the quality of the art work. The book is a paperback and black and white – yet this isn't really reflected in the price (£7.99) which would stretch to a selection of glossy colour or better drawn black and white slim graphic novels. The art work itself is okay, a cross over between traditional comic art and manga, so certainly on trend for the younger market, but it is not innovative or exciting and in places seems very flat and formulaic.

All in all, ODD IS ON OUR SIDE is a quick fun teen read and was perfectly enjoyable in terms of story and plot. Personally, I am hoping that more publishers take this approach with novels, creating short graphic novels for younger audiences. There are of course many people that dislike comics and believe they are for children. I would argue that comics are a fantastic way to reach a new generation of SF fans. *SF*

***PALE DEMON* by Kim Harrison**

Hapercollins / 487pgs / £7.99 paperback ISBN: 978-0007321971

Reviewed by Jim Pearce



This is the latest episode in the continuing saga of Rachel Morgan set in a world where witches, werewolves, pixies, vampires, fairies exist alongside humans, all fear the demons. She is feisty, totally loyal to friends, honorable and merciful to enemies and is also a witch. The book follows on from the events chronicled in BLACK MAGIC SANCTION (reviewed in the June 2010 issue 465 of the *Brum Group News*).

Required to travel from Cincinnati to San Francisco to have her 'shunning' by the witch community for allegedly being a black witch and dealing with demons, formally lifted and forced to travel overland instead of by plane as she would of course prefer. To make things more fun she is persuaded to take with her, Trent Kalamack, a closet elf and mega-rich businessman/criminal/politician whom she loathes but is at the same time strangely attracted to. Her other companions on this trip are her

partners, the pixie Jinx and the live vampire, Ivy. To further complicate things along the way they pick up Vivian, a member of the witches governing coven, who spies on her and reports back to her coven colleagues. As with the previous novels in the series, this book is full of fast paced non-stop action from start to finish with mayhem dogging her journey across America. This takes the form of elf assassins, and a daylight-walking, soul-eating demon who has just escaped his 2000 year old prison. As usual, while she does not instigate the violence and only tries to defend herself, her friends and bystanders, she is blamed for it. However, when it comes down to it, who is called upon to save the world from this monster? Yes, Rachel.

As with all the previous books in this series, I found PALE DEMON to be very well written, highly readable and full of well defined and enjoyable characters. Like its predecessors, it was a joy to read and I look forward to rereading it many times. I hope that there will be another book in this series JTP

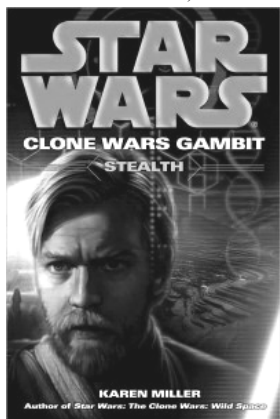
STAR WARS CLONE WARS GAMBIT: STEALTH by Karen Miller

Arrow/ 409 pgs / £7.99 paperback ISBN: 978-0099533221

Reviewed by Sam Fennell

This is the first part of a two-part series about Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker on a secret mission to a small and seemingly insignificant planet to investigate the development of a bio-weapon by the Separatists.

I'll start with the good points. It is clearly written, the *Star Wars* universe hangs together well, and the writer gets the *Star Wars* feel to the book across well. Some of the characters are portrayed with interesting conflict and for a two-part series the slower pace of the book is acceptable. I genuinely believe that movie and film tie-ins are a way to introduce people the wider SF genre, and so when reading this book I took two points into consideration – firstly, whether it represents the *Star Wars* genre well, and secondly, how it might fare in the SF genre as a whole. Unfortunately this book is a disappointment to the *Star Wars* franchise, let alone to the genre.



The main problem with this book is that there is a lack of understanding about the characters to the point where it became painful to read. Anyone who has watched the *Star Wars* movies will know that Jedi adhere to a strict code of discipline and morality; they spend years in training, they are often diplomats in peace negotiations, they are wise and akin to warrior monks. This book has constant bickering and sarcasm between Obi-Wan and Anakin that is simply out of character for them. I am also sure that Jedi are emotionally tortured in many ways, but they would not ‘over-share’ as happens in this book!

There was one scene in this book which made continuing with it until the end a painful experience. It was a moment in which the any plausibility of the characters was swiftly lost: Anakin Skywalker: ‘But that means <General Durd> escaped Republic Custody. How is that possible? And why didn’t we hear anything?’ “Well...’ Obi Wan ran a hand over his beard. “We’ve been a bit busy lately. Perhaps we missed the memo.”

As the first film came before any books, Obi-Wan Kenobi, as played by Guinness, is the ‘real’ Obi-Wan. I simply can’t imagine that character (or even the Ewan McGregor version of him) ever saying ‘we’ve been a bit busy lately’ or ‘perhaps we missed the memo’, as an excuse for not knowing that an evil general had escaped. Neither am I convinced that Jedi have memos. Having watched all films, I can’t recall any paper at all, let alone a memo!

This is American humour shoved into a franchise book which quite frankly, is a cheap shot at a joke. This is not even recommended to *Star Wars* fans that might generally enjoy the occasional franchise novel. SF

RECOMMENDED SF BOOKS – Rog Peyton

The sixth batch. Please note that these 10 books are NOT my favourite ten, or whatever – I’ve just picked books from the 100 at random. Another 10 next month. Please remember that I may be able to supply most of these titles – just email me and I can bring orders to the Group meetings.

Currently in print and widely available:-

Alfred Bester - THE DEMOLISHED MAN (1953) The very first winner of the Hugo Award! In the 24th century, crime is no more. The police have an elite corps of telepaths who can read minds before any crime is committed. But Ben Reich is determined to commit a murder... (Gollancz SF Masterworks 978-1857988222 - £7.99)

David Brin - THE POSTMAN (1985) A post-apocalyptic novel that hinges on one man’s desire to rebuild civilisation – and the stunning method he uses. (Orbit 978-1857234053 - £8.99)

Jack Finney - THE BODY SNATCHERS (1955) You may have seen the excellent original movie and even the later remakes, but reading this novel will still keep you on the edge of your seat biting your nails. Sheer suspense, beautifully written. (Gollancz SF Masterworks 978-0575085312 - £7.99)

Frank Herbert – DUNE (1965) Is there anyone in the Group who hasn’t read this superb novel? DUNE has sold over 10 million copies, becoming the most successful science fiction novel ever. Forget the sequels and spin-offs and be dazzled by this great novel. (Hodder paperback 978-0450011849 - £7.99 or Gollancz SF Masterworks hardcover 978-0575081505 - £8.99)

Michael Moorcock - BEHOLD THE MAN (1969) Karl Glogauer is a time traveller who finds himself in Palestine in the year 29AD. He is shocked to meet the man known as Jesus Christ -- a drooling idiot, hiding in the shadows of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth. A powerful anti-religious story. (Gollancz SF Masterworks 978-1857988482 - £7.99)

George R Stewart - EARTH ABIDES (1949) Without any doubt, the finest SF novel - ever! The best book of the collapse of civilisation which could so easily have resulted in a depressing novel but Stewart magnificently follows a small band of survivors as they struggle trying to rebuild some kind of civilisation. (Gollancz SF Masterworks 978-1857988215 - £7.99)

John Wyndham - THE CHRYSALIDS (1955) (aka RE-BIRTH) The post-nuclear story of genetic mutation in a devastated world. Easily the best novel that Wyndham produced. (Penguin 978-0141032979 - £8.99)

Currently out of print:-

George R R Martin - DYING OF THE LIGHT (1977) The story of Worlorn, a rogue planet spinning through space on its own. This was Martin’s first novel but possibly still his best. It’s only recently gone out of print and you may find copies still around.

Christopher Priest – A DREAM OF WESSEX (1977) The Ridpath Projector has created a simulation of Wessex as it might be in the 22nd century. A powerful and thought-provoking novel. Out of print but I can supply mint copies of the original Faber hardcover First Edition at £9.99. Or signed copies for £12.99. Just ask!

Theodore Roszak – FLICKER (1991) An amazing book! A novel which is part thriller, part occult horror, part fantasy, part science fiction, part film history. Its hero, following a quest to discover the truth about a little-known genius of the silent screen, journeys deep into Hollywood's heart of darkness. Out of print but I can supply the 1992 UK paperback at £3.99.

RGP

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

All details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise contacting organisers before travelling. Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the contact addresses.

Any information about forthcoming SF / Fantasy / Horror events are always welcome - please send to me at rog [dot] peyton [at] btinternet [dot] com

The Central Library SF and Fantasy Reading Group meets on Thursdays at 5.45pm to 7pm monthly, in GP5 on the 5th Floor at the Central Library, Chamberlain Square, B3 3HQ. It's a small friendly group meeting to discuss SF & fantasy books. Contact person is Pam Gaffney on (0121) 303 3398. Future books to be discussed to be announced

The British Library - “Out of this World: Science Fiction But Not As You Know It” will include works by Mary Shelley, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Francis Godwin, Cory Doctorow and China Miéville, among others as it traces the evolution of the genre. The exhibition runs from until 25 Sept and appearances by Iain M Banks, Brian Aldiss and Michael Moorcock are promised. There's a nice display of images on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-12860638> but full details can be found at <http://www.viewlondon.co.uk/whatson/out-of-this-world-science-fiction-but-not-as-you-article-612190-16498.html>

THE FANTASTICAL ART OF BRUCE PENNINGTON Exhibition runs from July 29th to August 27th at the Atlantis Bookshop, 49a Museum Street, London WC1A 1LY. Phone 0207 405 2120. Website address is <http://www.theatlantisbookshopevents.com>

ROBERT RANKIN EVENING at Phoenix Square, Midland Street, Leicester, LE1 1TG on Thursday September 15th. Phone 0116 242 2800. Website is http://www.phoenix.org.uk/index.php?cms_id=487

THE FESTIVAL OF FANTASTIC FILMS 2011 - The 22nd Annual Convention of the Society of Fantastic Films will be held on the 21st - 23rd October, 2011 at the Days Hotel, Sackville St., Manchester (The Manchester Conference Centre). Website is <http://fantastic-films.com/festival/>

OLYMPUS 2012 - The 2012 Eastercon, 6th - 9th April 2012 at the Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow, London, UK. Guests of Honour: Paul Cornell, George R.R. Martin, Steph Swainston. Fan Guests of Honour: Margaret Austin, Martin Easterbrook. Registration is £55 and increases on Aug 31st so register NOW. Website is <http://www.olympus2012.org/>

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

Oct 14th – **DAVID WINGROVE** author of the *Chung Kuo* SF sequence.

Nov 4th – **author, editor and publisher IAN WHATES**

Dec 2nd – **The Christmas Social**

Jan 13th 2012 – **Annual General Meeting and Auction**



NOVACON 41 will be held over the weekend of November 11th to the 13th at The Park Inn, 296 Mansfield Road, Nottingham. NG5 2BT. The Guest of Honour will be SF author JOHN MEANEY. Further details can be found on the website <http://novacon.org.uk/>

BRUM GROUP NEWS #479 (August 2011) copyright 2011 for Birmingham SF Group. Designed by Rog Peyton (19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL – phone 0121 477 6901 or email [rog \[dot\] peyton \[at\] bunternet \[dot\] com](mailto:rog@bunternet.com)). Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the committee or the general membership or, for that matter, the person giving the ‘opinion’.

Thanks to all the named contributors in this issue and to William McCabe who sends me reams of news items every month which I sift through for the best/most entertaining items.

ABOUT US... The **Birmingham Science Fiction Group** meets on the second Friday of each month. Membership is £16 per year per person (or £21 for two members living at the same address). This includes the 12 free issues of the Newsletter plus reduced entrance fee at each meeting. Cheques should be made payable to ‘The Birmingham Science Fiction Group’ and sent to our Membership Secretary, 10 Sylvan Avenue, Northfield, Birmingham, B31 2PG